Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2021

Vol. 46.2 #495

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Commius elegans, a species of shield bug
Dianne Thomson

March Meeting Presentation: Reiner Richter - Dragonflies

Our meeting on Friday 12 March, 7.30pm will again be online using Zoom (see details on back page). Following our AGM, the guest speaker will be Reiner Richter, one of the most prolific contributors to citizen science databases in Australia with many specialties including dragonflies and orchids. Reiner will tell us about the recent field guide he has produced together with Ian Endersby: "Dragonflies and Damselflies of Victoria and Tasmania". Reiner will explain what lead him to produce the book and the work required to get better photos of many of the species. He will also discuss the photo processing that was required in order to show the required detail for the publication.

Metallic Ringtail, *Austrolestes cingulatus*
Photo: Reiner Richter / iNaturalist

Desert Tracks and Wildflowers in Outback WA

Peter Turner

On the 22nd September 2018, with friends John and Helen Burdekin, I joined Coates Wildlife's camping tour into the Western part of the Great Victoria Desert and then south to the coast for 3 nights at the Eyre Bird Observatory. There were 6 passengers in 2 4WD vehicles driven by leader Tom Grove and naturalist Diana Papenfus. This report based on my talk via Zoom to the February CFNC meeting is about what we saw along the Annie Beadell and Connie Sue "Highways" and down the Haig Road to Cocklebiddy. Two days out from Perth we had passed through Kalgoorlie and other goldfield towns to our second bush camp near Laverton. On Day 3 we were on unsealed red tracks past White Cliffs and onto the Annie Beadell "Highway" built in November 1962 by Len Beadell and his team to complete the link to Coober Pedy [1]. During regular stops along the track, we marvelled at the diverse vegetation and

Frankenia cineria

Yellow Heath Myrtle, *Micromyrtus flaviflora*

stunning wildflowers, viewed the changing landform – dune fields, breakaways, rocky pillars – and looked for birds, insects and reptiles. Yeo Lake Nature Reserve provided an excellent camp site. Day 4 started through mulga woodland, then bluebush and spinifex and finally Marble Gum (*Euc. gongylocarpa)* woodland in the swales between widely spaced sand dunes running east-west. We arrived at Neale Junction NR for a two-night camp where the Annie Beadell and Connie Sue tracks cross.

Looking south across Mulga woodland

Marble Gum, *Euc. Gongylocarpa*

Highlights on Day 5 were an early bush walk through the woodland and along a sand dune, and a visit to a disused airfield further east, near which on a rocky hillside (breakaway) we saw various arrangements of small stones laid over bare ground. There are many such patterns across WA made by early Aboriginal peoples, but their age and purpose are not known [2].

On Day 6 we headed south on the Connie Sue, over sand dunes and across bluebush plains. A side trip took us to the "White Breakaway" where

Heading down the Connie Sue
- Sand dunes, Bluebush and Spinifex

gypsum deposits have been mined, leaving an extraordinary landscape and saline tolerant plants. Our camp was near Giles Crossing where the explorer passed on 19th September 1875 on his first complete crossing from Port Augusta to Perth – such a remote spot. The next day took us across increasingly bare pastoral leases to Rawlinna on the Trans Pacific Railway – where the train stops for passengers to enjoy a BBQ, despite the frequent strong winds! Then on Day 8 we drove east alongside the railway to Haig Road, which took us south to Cocklebiddy on Highway 1. A very slow drive, to avoid tyre damage from the sharp limestone rocks on the track, took us across the tree-less bluebush and white daisy covered plain - the Nullarbor.

White Breakaway with *Zygophillum sp.*

Bluebush and Daisies – Nullarbor view

The three days at the Eyre Bird Observatory need a separate report for another time. And the scheduled return to Perth through the southern section of the Western Woodland, from Norseman to Hyden, was replaced due to heavy rain by a route through very different country and wildflowers north to Dalwallinu.

We saw over 50 bird species, some desert reptiles and countless wildflowers, trees and shrubs – most so different from local Central Victorian species. My thanks to Helen Burdekin who helped greatly with wildflower identification long after the trip – an enjoyable challenge, bringing back memories of a memorable two weeks.

[1] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Roads built by Len Beadell
[2] There are many references to Aboriginal stone arrangements. For example: http://museum.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/5. Randolph.pdf

Desert Snow, *Macgregoria racemigera*

Upside Down plant, *Leptosema chambersii*

Yellow-flowering Box Mistletoe!

Frances Cincotta

Bendigo Field Naturalists, Rod and Jan Orr, told me of an unusual observation they made on Railway Dam Track just out of Chewton. They found a Box Mistletoe with yellow flowers rather than the usual bright red.

It's easy to find - from the Pyrenees Hwy at Chewton turn south into Railway Dam Track and the mistletoe is a big clump growing on a small Yellow Box tree on the right hand side of track before the track goes over the railway bridge. There are plenty of flowers right at eye level for easy photography.

Box Mistletoe (*Amyema miquelii*) is classified as a hemi-parasite. It has green leaves so makes some of its own food, but has no roots so relies on the tree's vascular system for water. Box Mistletoe is an important local native plant because its leaves provide food for larvae of moths and butterflies, the flowers provides nectar for many creatures, and its sweet fruits are a favourite food of mine and the Mistletoebird.

Yellow-flowered Box Mistletoe near Chewton, 21 Feb 2021

"iNaturalist for Beginners" Workshop Report

On February 21, Euan Moore led a small group (COVID-safe) workshop to help members get started with using iNaturalist, an international citizen science database. He first introduced iNaturalist to us, explaining its purpose and how records of all flora and fauna groups could feed through to other databases, importantly in the case of our observations, the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA). Adding validated records to the VBA was stressed as being important for providing Government Departments and other groups with reliable data on which to base recommendations for management plans etc. – if it is not recorded, it can't be protected!

Euan then stepped through the different menu options in iNaturalist, explaining which ones would be of most use for us initially and showed us how to search the database. He also pointed out the 'Projects' that he had set up in iNaturalist to automatically collect data from the Mount Alexander Shire region and the Castlemaine Landcare Group sites. The next step was to gently guide us through setting up our own log-on and user profile, and how to add observations. We all then practiced adding photographs of plants or creatures that we had taken for the workshop exercise, including as much detail as we could for the identification. Euan showed us examples of his own observations where other iNaturalist users had agreed with or added to his ID, eventually leading to a "Research grade" observation suitable for the ALA and VBA when agreement was reached. Workshop participants have now been very excited to get excellent feedback on their entries from other users. I have even been

helped by a 'Grass enthusiast' with how to photograph the relevant aspects of a grass seed to allow identification of a grass species!

Advice for my grass identification: "If you can manage a hairy side (back) and a less hairy side (front)…" of the seeds.

We all agreed that using iNaturalist would be a valuable tool for identifying our mystery plants or creatures as well as enabling us to add to the knowledge of flora and fauna in our region. We can also assist other users by contributing to the identification of their records. While Euan stressed that we should all keep our own records, backed up, contributing to a collection for our region would provide a valuable resource. We are also looking forward to participating in the Southern Hemisphere bioblitz project on iNaturalist in September using our new-found skills!

Euan has offered to run another workshop for those who couldn't attend the first one, so please contact him on calamanthus5@bigpond.com if you are interested.

Jenny Rolland

March Observations (1943)

George Broadway

Notes from "Wildlife" magazine of March 1943.

Surprisingly there was not much reference to the war. However it did mention that the ducks were having a good summer because a rather wet season combined with a shortage of firearms and ammunition had provided ideal conditions.

Cabbage White Butterflies were still a novelty and there were hopes that their spread might be restricted. Various possible control measures were discussed including control by birds.

It was reported that the English Speckled Thrush did a very thorough job in picking off all the caterpillars in someone's cabbage patch, while Blue Wrens and Sparrows were also observed doing their bit. Thrushes are present in Melbourne gardens, but not Castlemaine.

The growing of Flax was a new wartime industry. However after the flax has been turned over the uncovered earth provides a feast of grubs and worms for unwary birds. As they move along the rows their feet pick up threads of flax. When they fly to perch in a tree the flax fibres catch on a bough and the birds when they try to fly find themselves trapped hanging head downwards.

Prizes were awarded to best letter and competition winners, first prize five shillings, second, two and six. Prizes were in the form of war savings stamps. Here is a sample entry, sadly there are no prizes.

Where the reeds and water-ribbons
Flourish in the lakes and SHEMRAS
Hiawatha looks for bird life.

DWIL SKUDC there he finds in plenty-
CLABK KUCD, LATE, and gaudy SKULCHED,
LUBLILBE too and stiff-tailed SKUM CDUK
Swimming, while the wary TREEDLOT
Runs among the stones for shelter---
Other days has Hiawatha,
Spent among the bushland creatures
BACEGAB SELTEBFRUIT flit past him,
Chased by HESSRUTH, SWERN, and WARSROPS
GLYNIF OXF, the TUIRF TAB, sees him
From his camp among the gumtrees
"Every day", says Hiawatha,
"Something new makes life seem happy!"

The specimens sent in for identification again show little variety, many having been sent in previously. Here they are then, how many can we find around here?

Insects

Brighton: Two Tree Crickets, *Paragryllacris*. Huge jaws for chewing firewood as well as grubs, etc. See June 16

Ascot Vale: Convolvulus Hawk Moth, plentiful at this time of year. See April 17

Frankston: Orange or Giant Robber Fly, *Blepharotes coriarius*. Catches other insects on the wing. See Mar 17

Portarlington: Mason wasp. Does not sting people but stings caterpillars and spiders with paralysing fluid. Then stores them in its mud nest to feed its young.

Macedon: The spots on the gum leaf were caused by one of the gall-making scale insects, *Apiomorpha.* A group peculiar to Australia.

Tittybong: Three specimens of Lictor Case Moths, the larvae of which spend their entire juvenile lives in the case, adding to it as they grow. The name comes from the arrangement of sticks in the case like the parallel sticks in the bundle or "Fasces" carried by the "Lictor" a Roman state official.

Box Hill: The brightly coloured caterpillar found on the "Swan" plant is the larva of the Wanderer Butterfly. See Dec 16

Charlton: Two different bugs, not beetles. Green Vegetable Bug, *Nezara viridula*. Dec '16. The other the Crusader Bug, *Myctis profana.* Nov'17. Both do harm to crops and shrubs.

Stawell: Vine Hawk Moth, the spine in the tail was not a sting. Feb '18
Also Tooan

Brighton: There is no relationship between your silverfish and moth even though both have bodies which are covered in silvery scales.

South Yarra: Green cocoon of one of the Drinker Moths Dec '16. The green cocoon is probably to make it look like unripe fruit on the tree.

Horsham: Wattle Goat Moth, whose larvae do much damage to the roots of wattle trees 'Mar '17 Also Red Cliffs

Horsham: The insects in the Pearl Barley were rice weevils. It is useless to screw down the lid as the eggs will already be present. If desperate try an hour in the oven.

Diamond Creek: Juvenile Harlequin Bugs; sap suckers which will harm any vegetation which has sap in it. Mar '17

Chetwynd: Pupa of large beetle, possibly the leaf-eating Sun Beetle *Anoplognathus.*

Ferntree Gully: Giant phasma or Stick insect with large fantastically camouflaged body that looks as though it were made of sticks. June '16

Robinvale: A Jewel beetle. May '17. Some were used as ornaments, set in gold and worn as brooches or pendants.

Castlemaine: One of the Elephant Beetles called the Orange Weevil because it attacks citrus fruit and does damage in citrus-growing areas.

Coburg: Lacewing, a useful insect because the wingless juveniles feed on Aphis and similar.

Also St Kilda

Hampton: Immature Katydid or Gumleaf Grasshopper. The adult wings are a perfect imitation of gumleaves, even to the venation.

Sherbrooke: The pretty little beetle was a pink *Paropsis,* one of the leaf-eating beetles not unlike an enlarged Ladybird in shape with the high domed body, but the colouring and texture are different. See Aug '18

Other Invertebrates

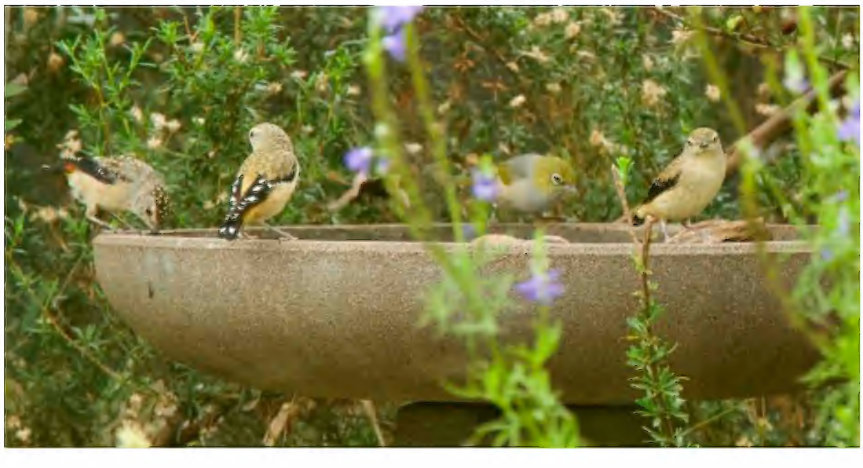
Bacchus Marsh: The long thin worm was a Gordius worm, found in fresh water or marshy ground, harmless to everything except the water-beetles in which they spend their juvenile lives as parasites.

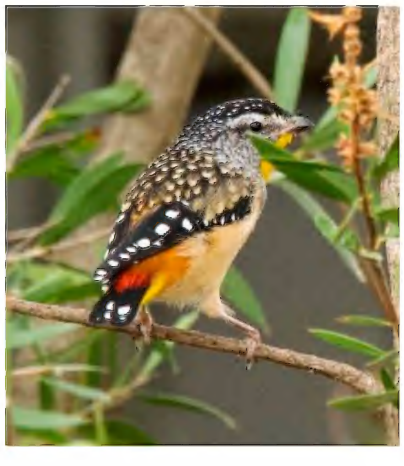
Glen Alpin (Q): The specimens found in a rock pool on top of 4000 foot rocks were *Estheria,* a little Crustacean so little known it has no common name *(In a recent paper it is referred to as a Clam Shrimp. A close relative Cypris, has the common name "Full Stop").* It appears like a mollusc, rather like a miniature mussel but the jointed limbs show it to be one of the humble relatives of the crayfish. They appear suddenly in temporary pools, hatching from wind-born eggs, go through their life span amazingly quickly and produce eggs which are capable of remaining viable for years in a dry condition. They then germinate when they reach suitable water.

Observations

Rosemary and Peter Turner: Family gathering for a morning drink!

This morning (20/2/21) around 11 am we saw and heard a number of Pardalotes around our back garden bird bath. As we watched, about 6 sat around the rim - along with a Silvereye - with others in the trees above. Sounded like bellbirds with so many calling! By the time I had collected my camera, fewer were around the bird bath, and the calls were even louder. At least one splendid male, and a number of juveniles. Probably a female or two as well, but not caught on camera.

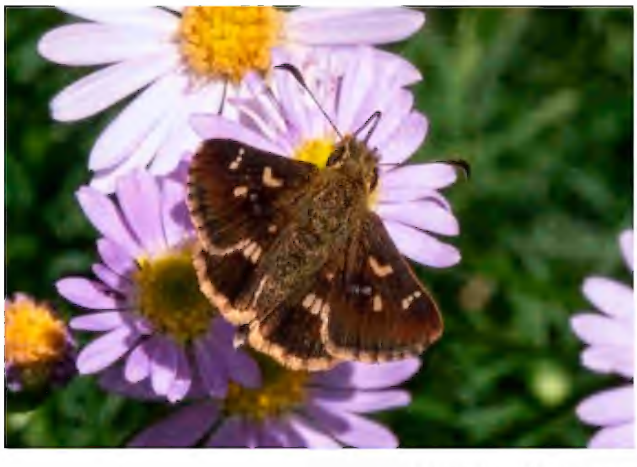
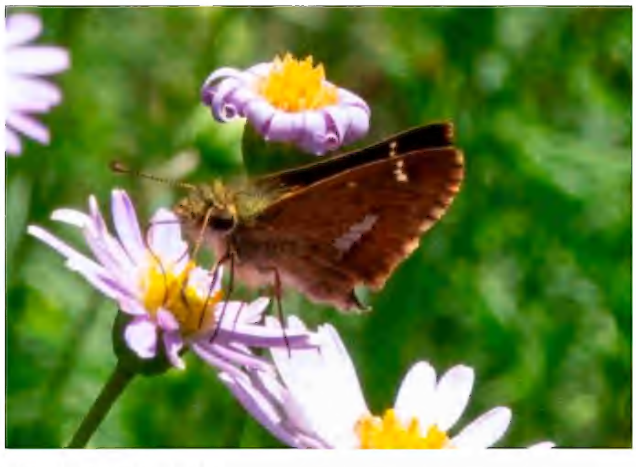




Euan Moore:

The native Brachyscome daisies in our garden are a magnet for insect pollinators. Recently we have had two species of skipper butterflies visiting. Both are small heavy bodied butterflies with wingspans of 23-25mm. The most common of these visitors is the Greenish Grass-dart, *Ocybadistes walkeri*. The Greenish Grass-dart often holds its hind-wings flat and the fore-wings erect in a distinctive pose which may be the origin of the name 'dart' for some of this group of butterflies. In late February I have also seen the Barred Skipper, *Dispar compacta*, at these flowers.

Greenish Grass-dart, *Ocybadistes walkeri*

Barred Skipper, *Dispar compacta*

Also found in the garden (27/2/21):

Native cockroach, *Ellipsidion australe*

Mistletoe Moth, *Comocrus behri.*
Railway Dam. *Photo: Noel Young*

Hanging Fly, *Harpobitticus sp.*, with prey.
Expedition Pass. *Photo: Euan Moore*

Geraldine Harris: Observations at Barkers Creek

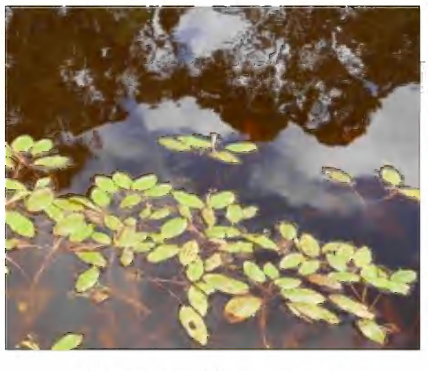
While walking in our bush I have noticed a number of Variable Glycine (*Glycine tabacina*) plants emerging. This scrambling plant has leaves with three leaflets, with the central stalk longer than the side stalks. Unfortunately, in my experience, they are usually eaten before they develop beyond a few leaves. I wonder how many other 'rare' plants suffer the same fate. In the same area I found a small patch of Woolly New Holland Daisy (*Vittadinia gracilis*) and a number of Small St John's Wort (*Hypericum gramineum*) plants in flower. I also photographed one very late Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictum*) with a possible pollinator.

Variable Glycine
(*Glycine tabacina*)

Small St John's Wort
(*Hypericum gramineum*)

Chocolate Lily
(*Arthropodium strictum*)

Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum laciniatum*) is flowering and fruiting along Barkers Creek and I found Floating Pond-weed (formerly known as *Potamogeton tricarinatus*, now possibly *Potamogeton sulcatus*) and a good patch of Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis acuta*) along the edge of our big dam.



Floating Pond-weed
(*Potamogeton sulcatus*)

Common Spike-rush
(*Eleocharis acuta*)

19/2/21 Two Marbled Geckoes at our kitchen window sill this evening - one had hold of the other by the neck. After

a struggle the victim escaped and moved along the window ledge to recover while the other one retreated to guard the entrance of his usual spot, under the sliding window frame. Over many years we have often seen a gecko watching from this spot ready to pounce on any unsuspecting prey attracted by the light inside.

Birds so far this year -

White-browed Babblers - making dust baths in the dirt
Red-rumped Parrots 5 pairs feeding among grasses
White-plumed Honeyeater - mother feeding 3 fledglings in turn in tree
New Holland Honeyeater at the bird baths
Grey Shrikethrush taking daily bath
Superb Fairy-wrens regularly foraging on grass
White-winged Choughs at bird bath
Australian Magpie lurking under Swallow nests
Red-browed Finches - up to 8 feeding together on grass
Willy Wagtail - common this year, 9 on grass at once
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike skulking about in trees of an evening when air full of small birds calling.
Wedge-tailed Eagle - up to 3 soaring overhead and eventually disappearing from sight at a great height
Pied Currawong watching for prey of an evening
Brown Treecreepers (2)
Crested Shrike-tit - first sighting this year 18/2
Peaceful Dove - 2 wandered past window on way to bird bath
Dusky Woodswallows - many soaring and resting together in trees
Common Bronzewing - good to see 2 again after one of regular pair killed when it flew into window about three years ago
Musk Lorikeets - feeding in flowering *Eucalyptus leucoxylon rosea*
Olive-backed Oriole has begun to call
Little Ravens at bird bath
Eastern Rosellas at bird bath
Crimson Rosellas at bird bath
White-browed Scrubwren - retreating to under shrubs when disturbed at bird bath
Welcome Swallows - swooping when I sit in chair under their nest to read

Correction

The name of the beautiful Lobelia reported along the Tatt Town Track in the February 'Castlemaine Naturalist' was *Lobelia gibbosa*, not *Lobelia rhombifolia* (not known in this area).

Roadside Clean-ups

CFNC aims to do 4 roadside clean-ups along a stretch of the Pyrenees Highway each year. With eased COVID restrictions, the next clean-up will be on Monday March 15.

- Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am
- Garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear and bring your own gloves and water
- Please contact Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

From your Committee

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2021 AGM will be held at 7.30 pm on Friday 12th March by Zoom and will be followed by a guest speaker, Reiner Richter (see page 1). The AGM agenda will include the Annual Report for 2020, the Treasurer's Report, and the election of office bearers and committee members for 2021. Nominations for new members of the committee are welcome and should reach the Secretary before the meeting. Members considering nominating for the committee are encouraged to contact the Secretary or one of the committee members.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

At the February meeting, members passed the motion that membership fees are unchanged for 2021.

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME!

The following members joined CFNC since March 2020:

Nina Tsilikas, Giles Daubeney, John Landy, David Cheal, Richard Goonan, Jackie Moore, Richard Grant, Judy Annear.

We wish them a happy and stimulating association with the club, and look forward to meeting face-to-face at forthcoming excursions, and at meetings later in the year.

CONGRATULATIONS!

To CFNC member Cathrine Harboe-Ree who was awarded an AM in the recent Australia Day Honours for her "significant service to the library and information sciences".

Excursion – Tullaroop Reservoir, Saturday March 13

Leaders – Peter and Rosemary Turner

Our February excursion to Tullaroop Reservoir had to be postponed due to a sudden COVID lockdown, so we will try again on Saturday March 13.

Meet at the car park opposite the Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp or at the Tullaroop Reservoir picnic ground at the dam wall at 2pm.

Watch out for raptors as you drive across the Moolort Plains to the reservoir!

After gathering at the picnic ground, we will take a short drive to where we will park and then walk along the shore of the lake and in nearby bushland. Afterwards we will drive back to the picnic ground for afternoon tea. There is a toilet block at the picnic ground.

Bring binoculars, sunhat, block-out, hand sanitiser, water and snacks and wear stout walking shoes.

Please comply with current Government COVID-safe requirements.
The Field Trip will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.
There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings will continue to be held on-line via ZOOM until further notice, commencing at 7.30pm. If you have registered for our previous webinar meetings you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom. If you have not joined before and wish to attend, please email Peter Turner at munrodsl@iinet.net.au

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos to be shown please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by Noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions will be held this year (subject to any changes in COVID restrictions) on the Saturday after the monthly meeting. Meet at the Octopus (opposite the motel in Duke St) for departure at 1.30pm unless otherwise advised.

Fri Mar 12 Meeting: AGM. Speaker - Reiner Richter: 'Dragonflies and Damselflies of Victoria and Tasmania' (see page 1)

Sat Mar 13 Excursion: Tullaroop Reservoir (see page 11)

Mon Mar 15 Roadside clean-up (see page 10)

Fri Apr 9 Meeting: Speaker - Jess Lawton 'Phascogales – ecology and monitoring'

Sat Apr 10 Excursion: 'Phascogale nest box monitoring'

Fri May 14 Meeting: Speaker - Geoff Williams 'Rakali'

Sat May 15 AM Excursion: Campbells Creek 'Rakali and platypus habitat'

2020/21 COMMITTEE

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	Euan Moore	0407 519 091
	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867

Club website (Webmaster: Ron Wescott) http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2021 (Membership forms on CFNC website)

Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30

NEWSLETTER

Deadline for the April 2021 "Castlemaine Naturalist": **26th March**
Email newsletter material to: **newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com**

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